

A new species of *Lerista* (Lacertilia: Scincidae) with two subspecies from central Australia

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Abstract

A new species, *Lerista aericeps*, closely related to the Western Australian species *L. separanda* and *L. xanthura*, is described from the Northern Territory and south-western Queensland. It is divided into two subspecies.

Introduction

Over the last few years Alice Springs herpetologists have collected several specimens of two *Lerista* related to the western species *L. separanda* and *L. xanthura* (both of Storr 1976). Believing them to be new, M.W. Gillam and his colleagues in the Conservation Commission of the Northern Territory sent me live and preserved specimens for description (catalogue numbers prefixed with CAWC). Also examined were two specimens in the Western Australian Museum (WAM), and three from the Queensland Museum (QM) loaned by J. Covacevich.

Systematics

Lerista aericeps aericeps sp. et subsp. nov.

Figure 1

Holotype

R1565 in Central Australian Wildlife Collection, Alice Springs, collected by A. Kerle at 25 km S Alice Springs, Northern Territory, on 5 November 1985.

Paratypes

Northern Territory

71 km W Barry Caves (WAM R55381-2); Kurundi Station in 20°37'S, 134°50'E (CAWC R1140); 27 km N Alice Springs (CAWC R1573); Ewaninga (CAWC R50); Andado (CAWC R379).

Queensland

Cluny (QM J34137); Durrie (QM J39572); Cuddapan (QM J26502).

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Diagnosis

A small slender *Lerista* with four fingers, four toes and immovable eyelid (a large transparent disc), distinguishable from *L. separanda* and *L. xanthura* by its coppery head, faintly spotted back and tail, and single preocular (rather than two). Further distinguishable from *L. separanda* by its yellow (rather than red) tail and five (rather than four) supraciliaries. Distinguishable from *L. aericeps taeniata* by lack of dark upper lateral stripe.

Description

Snout-vent length (mm): 34-49 (N 10, mean 40.4). Length of tail (% SVL): 118-133 (N 3, mean 125.3).

Nasals in short contact or narrowly separated. Prefrontals widely separated. Frontoparietals in short to long contact, usually a little smaller than interparietal. Nuchals 1-4 (N 10, mean 2.3). Supraoculars 3, first two in contact with frontal. Supraciliaries 5, second and fifth smallest. Loreals 2, first much the larger. Preocular much smaller than second loreal (absent in one specimen). One presubocular. Temporals 3. Upper labials 6. Midbody scale rows 18. Lamellae under longest toe 13-15 (N 10, mean 14.2), each finely keeled.

Coloration of holotype in life. Head coppery red. Back pale greyish brown, tinged with copper and olive, scales finely dark-edged and faintly flecked with



Figure 1 Holotype of *Lerista aericeps aericeps*, photographed in life by R.E. Johnstone.

dark brown. Tail (regenerated) yellowish brown with coppery tinge. Upper lateral stripe represented by dark dots on body and by a diffuse blackish-brown stripe from orbit through lore to side of rostral. Legs pale greyish brown, faintly smudged with dark greyish brown. Lower surface whitish, scales finely dark-edged.

Most paratypes darker than holotype and more heavily spotted (including top of head and side of body). Some have upper labials barred and ventrals more widely dark-edged.

Distribution

Arid eastern interior of Northern Territory, north nearly to Barkly Tableland, and arid south-western Queensland. See map, Figure 2.



Figure 2 Map of Northern Territory and western Queensland, showing location of specimens of *Lerista a. aericeps* (spots) and *L. a. taeniata* (circles).

Derivation of name

From Latin *aes* (copper) and *ceps* (head).

Lerista aericeps taeniata subsp. nov.

Figure 3

Holotype

R1566 in Central Australian Wildlife Collection, Alice Springs, collected by S.R. Morton at 20 km E of The Granites, Northern Territory, in 20°34'S, 130°38'E, on 15 November 1985.

Paratypes

Northern Territory

Tanami Desert in 20°15'S, 131°45'E (CAWC R1043); 20 km E The Granites (CAWC R1567-72, 1574-76); Sangsters Bore (20°53'S, 130°24'E) (CAWC R1314).

Diagnosis

Distinguishable from *L. a. aericeps* by its dark upper lateral stripe, larger preocular and more numerous midbody scale rows (mostly 20, v. 18), and from *L. orientalis* (DeVis) by its coppery head and yellow tail and very different habitat (red desert sands, v. subhumid woodlands).

Description

Snout-vent length (mm): 21.5-44 (N 12, mean 34.3). Length of tail (% SVL): 116-142 (N 5, mean 123.8).

Nasals in short contact. Prefrontals widely separated. Frontoparietals in long contact, usually a little smaller than interparietal. Nuchals 2-4 (N 12, mean 2.3). Supraoculars 3, first two in contact with frontal. Supraciliaries 5, second and fifth smallest. Loreals 2, first much the larger. Preocular as high as second loreal but narrower. One presubocular. Temporals 3. Upper labials 6. Midbody scale rows 18 (N 3) or 20 (N 8). Lamellae under longest toe 14-17 (N 11, mean 15.7), each finely keeled.

Coloration of holotype in life. Head and neck coppery red. Back pale coppery olive-brown, still paler in narrow strip next to upper lateral stripe; dorsals finely dark-edged and faintly flecked with blackish brown, marks tending to form four longitudinal lines of dots (paravertebral strongest). Tail greenish yellow, finely and faintly flecked with black. Blackish-brown upper lateral stripe, one and a half scales wide on body, narrowing as it passes through orbit and lore to side of rostral. Legs pale greyish brown, smudged with blackish brown. Lower surface whitish.

Upper lateral stripe narrower (one scale wide) in some paratypes, and meeting its opposite number at tip of snout in others.



Figure 3 Holotype of *Lerista aericeps taeniata*, photographed in life by R.E. Johnstone.

Distribution

Arid western interior of Northern Territory (Tanami Desert). See map, Figure 2.

Derivation of name

From Latin *taeniatus* (striped).

Reference

Storr, G.M. (1976). Revisionary notes on the *Lerista* (Lacertilia, Scincidae) of Western Australia. *Rec. West. Aust. Mus.* 4: 241-256.